

November 3, 2006

Steven Breckler, Ph.D.
Executive Director
American Psychological Association
750 First St., NE
Washington, DC 20002

Dear Steve:

The scientists listed below, members of the Society of Experimental Psychologists, view with alarm and dismay a change in the implementation of the peer review system at NIMH that has been announced by its director. The relevant statement is: **“When making awards, we reserve the right to withhold or grant funding on applications at any ranking based on program priority.”**

Previous policy involved funding the top rated grants by the relevant peer review panel, up to some rating percentage. The director, in consultation with administrators and councils, then exercised discretion in selecting additional grants for funding from those rated acceptable. This system had been accepted by most of the scientific community as a fair and balanced way to share decision making between the scientists and the agency.

We believe that the new policy downgrades the role of peer review, unbalances the system, will lead to poorer science, and is a step in exactly the wrong direction. No one scientist, including the NIMH director, can possibly have the breadth of expertise needed to determine which disciplines, among the enormous range that are critically relevant for dealing with mental health, should be considered for funding by the institute. Furthermore, no one scientist can evaluate the scientific value and potential of grants that span that range. The role of scientific panels is exactly that—to supply the scientific expertise that will insure funding goes to the best and most promising science. The newly stated policy also provides a strong disincentive for the best scientists to serve on review panels, possibly further degrading the peer review system. If the recently announced change is prompted by budgetary concerns, we note that the role of peer review should be enhanced, not lessened, in times of monetary shortfalls, so that every dollar is spent effectively on the best possible scientific studies.

We are therefore writing to ask that your organization explore every possible avenue to express to relevant groups and individuals such concerns by the scientific community. The change that Director Insel announced is a real threat to the peer review process, and in our view can only harm the nation’s effort to deal with its serious mental health crisis. We ask also that you communicate these concerns to other advocacy groups. Please feel free to use this letter in any way that helps further the case for returning to a system with peer review more clearly at the heart of process of awarding grants.

Sincerely,

[The following scientists have each asked that their names be appended to this letter. The names represent a cross section of the best scientists in the field, many of whom have been funded by NIH and NIMH over the years, and many of whom have served on NIH and NIMH review panels.]

Lorraine Allan	Dedre Gentner	Geoff Loftus	David Rosenbaum
John Anderson	Lila Gleitman	Gordon Logan	Mark Rosenzweig
Greg Ashby	Stephen Goldinger	Zhong-Lin Lu	Evelyn Satinoff
Dave Balota	Robert Goldstone	Duncn Luce	Daniel Schacter
Mahzarin Banaji	Norma Graham	Donald Macleod	Richard Shiffrin
Irv Biederman	Tony Greenwald	Larry Marks	Paul Slovic
Robert Bjork	Charles Gross	Dom Massaro	Linda Smith
Randolph Blake	Alice Healy	Jay McClelland	Ed Smith
Don Blough	Dick Held	Mike McCloskey	George Sperling
Lyle Bourne	Julian Hochberg	Gail McKoon	John Staddon
Gordon Bower	Keith Holyoak	Doug Medin	Claude Steele
Jerry Busemeyer	Dave Huber	Janet Metcalfe	Larry Stein
John Cacioppo	Earl Hunt	Dave Meyer	Bob Sternberg
Byron Campbell	Peter Killeen	Walter Mischel	Saul Sternberg
Alfonso Caramazza	Larry Jacoby	Ray Nickerson	Philip Teitelbaum
Mike Cole	Herb Jenkins	Robert Nosofsky	Herb Terrace
Diana Deutsch	James Jenkins	Steve Palmer	James Townsend
Karen DeValois	Marcia Johnson	Hal Pashler	Anne Treisman
Barbara Doshier	Phil Johnson-Laird	Mary Peterson	Michael Turvey
Manny Douchin	Dan Kahneman	Richard Pew	Barbara Tversky
Howard Egeth	Nancy Kanwisher	Irwin Pollack	Bill Uttal
Charles Erickson	Lloyd Kaufman	James Pomerantz	Alan Wagner
William Estes	John Kihlstrom	Michael Posner	Tom Wallsten
Martha Farah	Roberta Klatzky	Mary Potter	Brian Wandell
Randy Gallistel	Carol Krumhansl	Keith Rayner	John Wixted
Rochel Gelman	Michael Kubovy	Ruddy Roediger	Jeremy Wolfe

This letter has been sent on behalf of the above scientists by:

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